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The After Party: Poems



Synopsis

"A truly moving book." —John Ashbery
Jana Prikryl's *The After Party* journeys across borders and eras, from cold war Central Europe to present-day New York City, from ancient Rome to New World suburbs, constantly testing the lingua francas we negotiate to know ourselves. These poems disclose the tensions in our inherited identities and showcase Prikryl's ambitious experimentation with style. *Thirty Thousand Islands*, the second half of the collection, presents some forty linked poems that incorporate numerous voices. Rooted in one place that fragments into many places—the remote shores of Lake Huron in Canada, a region with no natural resources aside from its beauty—these poems are an elegy that speaks beyond grief. Penetrating, vital, and visionary, *The After Party* marks the arrival of an extraordinary new talent.

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Customer Reviews

A seagull at home in this valley steps into air above the river. I'd like to follow it holding the wind to account while flinging itself out into it. The opening lines of "Argus, or Fear of Flying," the second poem in this collection by Czech-Canadian poet (and NYRB editor) Jana Prikryl. It is a striking image for any creative endeavor, that daring leap into the elements. If Prikryl had developed the bird image, say like Hopkins in "The Windhover," I would have been soaring right there with her. But she is a less physical poet than that, abstracting rather than realizing, using ideas as her safety net. The stanza continues in quite a different vein: [] Remove in reading and being in the music when you listen—not that you moved back but forward into remove—saw you off a wall patched with lichen, consortium of air and electric currents it'd be difficult to itemize expressing you across the

river. It deepens like a mind accruing images. The unexpected ambiguity of that word "remove" stops the seagull in its flight. Is it a verb or a noun? It is a withdrawing or surrender? She answers, of course; "being in the music when you listen" pairs the physical image with mental one, and she makes clear that this remove is something you step forward into, not back. The wild "consortium of air and electric currents" is contrasted with the concrete detail of the "wall patched with lichen." Reinforcement or contradiction? Or both at the same time? "Like a mind accruing images." Reading these poems, I find a constant tension between actuality and idea in Prikryl's work.

The dictionary defines "after party" as "a usually exclusive party or event that takes place after a performance or other event or after a main party." Thus, many years ago I was on the board of an organization that presented a large summer blues festival in a public place. After the festival, we retreated to a small club for what was known as the after party. The term is of relatively recent vintage and apparently was first used in the early 1960s. "The After Party" is the title and guiding metaphor of this new and first book of poems by Jana Prikryl, senior editor of the New York Review of Books. A small number of the poems are set at parties, but the "after party" metaphor goes deeper. The poems describe a variety of people, places, scenes and activities. The depictions themselves in the poems would be the poems and the poet's reflections on these first-order events would be the after party. Following through, the book is in two broad parts. The first, untitled part of the book consists of about 30 separate poems. The poems are set in a variety of places from Italy to New York City, to Canada, to small towns. They are in a variety of voices and cover different stages of life from childhood to age. Many of the poems appear to be autobiographical and reflect upon relationships with siblings, parents, friends, and family. Other poems reflect on historical people, such as "Stanley Cavell [an American philosopher] Pauses on the Aventine" or "The Letters of George Kennan and John Lukas Interspersed with some of my Dreams."

THE AFTER PARTY arrives with a cover blurb by the esteemed poet, John Ashbery. This is one of his sentences from the blurb I found helpful as an introduction to reading Ms. Prikryl's gathered poems: I am reminded of Wallace Stevens's title "A Completely New Set of Objects," except that her poetry doesn't really include objects, but is more like a private biosphere subject to its own climate conditions and laws of growth. The growth of which Ashbery wrote could be understood as change. Change is a word, and motif, which appears in several of her poems, and pivotal to the progression of her work with the title TO TELL OF BODIES CHANGED, a poem from which I hesitate before quoting, sensing grains of painful experience, which, I admit, may be no

more than the pain in paint, so goes the wit of poets: A painter once squared himself a difficult question and said no one could just create a landscape, but isn't it true that expectation builds a neighborhood and there is nowhere else that you can live. It was possession, turns out, by a force whose intention touched the first body alone, a body changed again precisely by its own form, a very special intention. A reversal shows the landscape cognizant of the artist. She writes in *GEODES OF THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE*: The earth knows Andre Breton, compiles ingenuous personalities in its fevered correspondence and while we're at the business of naming, as a student of cinema and photography, it comes as little surprise when Prikl mentions the name of Stanley Cavell, one of the pioneer philosophers who still contemplates the visual arts, photography and cinema, in a philosophical framework.

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